

hours. Despite the fact that as many as four unexpected deaths were attributed to mismanagement and lack of oversight, thousands of dollars in bonuses were awarded to top level executives at the facility.

At the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta, thousands of patients sat on a backlogged list for endoscopy consultations after management failed to act in a timely manner to schedule appointments for check-ups in the gastrointestinal clinic. These delays contributed to the deaths of three patients, who died waiting for care in what could otherwise have been a treatable illness. No one has been fired at this facility—to the contrary, VA refuses to say whether or not officials there are eligible for bonuses despite the deaths. Simply put, our veterans deserve better.

It is past time that we stop rewarding people for simply showing up to work—bonuses should be the exception, not the norm. It should never be easier to get a bonus than to get fired, but that is what we have seen at the VA.

Top officials at facilities from Atlanta to Pittsburgh have received “performance awards,” even while veterans died. Veterans deserve to know that in return for serving their country, they will not be endangered in the very place they go to seek care. They deserve the peace of mind that would come from knowing that those responsible for the tragic deaths received more than a slap on the wrist one day and a bonus the next. Our veterans deserve to know that deaths in the system are taken seriously and met with consequences. It is incomprehensible that management officials could simultaneously be complicit in mismanagement that led to a preventable death and also rewarded with a hefty bonus.

Furthermore, at a time when so many of our soldiers are returning from war, and in light of the deaths in Georgia and across the country, I believe the VA should prioritize veterans’ health and well-being above all else.

Mr. Chair, I believe we should reward our veterans with quality care and services in exchange for their commitment to our country and our freedoms. Money spent on executive bonuses would be better spent on ensuring our nation’s men and women in uniform receive the best possible care when they come home.

I urge my colleagues to join me in expressing support for our nation’s veterans by supporting this amendment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF
SENATOR MARGARET CRAVEN

HON. MICHAEL H. MICHAUD

OF MAINE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2014

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the career of Maine State Senator Margaret Craven.

A native of Galway, Ireland, Senator Craven immigrated to Massachusetts at the age of 17 and later moved to Maine where she adopted Lewiston as her home city. Senator Craven was first elected to the Maine House of Representatives in 2002 and later to the Maine Senate in 2008.

Senator Craven currently serves as Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee and as a member of the Government Oversight Committee, and has previously served on the Appropriations Committee.

During her time in the Maine Legislature, Senator Craven has fought tirelessly on behalf of Maine’s most vulnerable citizens, including veterans, the elderly, the disabled, women and children. Among her most significant accomplishments is her work on the Commission to Study Long-Term Care Facilities, which provided recommendations for addressing long-term care challenges in Maine.

In addition to her service in the Maine Legislature, Senator Craven has served her community through other means as a hospice volunteer and board member for several organizations, including Lewiston Public Library, Healthy Androscoggin, and Community Concepts.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking Maine State Senator Margaret Craven for her service to the state of Maine and in wishing her the best of luck in future endeavors.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RE- LATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2015

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 30, 2014

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 4486) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes:

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chair, I rise to speak on H.R. 4486, MILCON-VA Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2015.

The bill provides a total of \$165 billion in FY 2015 to fund military construction projects and programs of the Veterans Affairs Department—\$7 billion (4 percent) more than current funding.

This total includes \$93.5 billion in mandatory spending (all for VA benefits) and \$71.5 billion in discretionary funding.

Sequestration has caused significant problems for the VA in meeting the needs of our nation’s veterans.

Unfortunately, H.R. 4486, does not provide the President’s budget request for Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) medical care and includes unnecessary restrictions that could have negative consequences for benefits to our veterans.

I am disappointed with the funding level for VA Medical Care, which is \$368 million below the President’s request.

This funding level could delay the timely delivery of health care services to veterans and impede the Administration’s efforts to end veterans’ homelessness in 2015.

I hold our men and women of the armed services in the highest regard. I have fought for them to receive pay raises, affordable and safe housing, family support services, and the best possible medical care.

The Dr. Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center is in my District, and I am proud to say that

Harris County is home to 187,717 veterans and Texas is called home by more than 1,618,413 veterans.

Our veterans never fail to respond to the call to serve their country. That is why we cannot and must not fail to serve them. And that begins by eliminating the back log. Veterans should not have to wait months to receive the care they need.

We must continue to fund programs to end veteran homelessness and increase benefits for veterans to assure they have access to healthcare, education and good paying jobs.

My support of veterans has been consistent and strong over the time I have served in the House of Representatives. I know firsthand how painful it is for Veterans to seek assistance for medical care—especially PTSD or Traumatic Brain injuries.

The VA has made important progress on the disability claims backlog which was at 900,000 last year, but the agency despite sequestration has made progress in reducing.

I will not be satisfied until the VA disability claims backlog has been eliminated.

VA funding should not be reduced from the amount requested by the Administration especially in light of the continuing backlog in disability claims.

Further, the bill provides \$50 million below the request for Information Technology operations and maintenance programs, which may result in delayed technology infrastructure improvements that ensure continuity of operations for services that support all of VA’s services and benefit delivery.

I appreciate the funding level provided for electronic health record interoperability and VistA Evolution, but I object to restriction on obligations for VistA modernization efforts.

Interoperability between the DOD and VA recordkeeping systems could significantly reduce the number of Veteran disability claims that are waiting processing.

Interoperability can also lead to significant cost savings by reducing inefficiencies that are created when the capacity for computing systems to automate benefits management and track claim submissions are not available.

Furthermore, interoperability among systems that are key to our men and women in uniform transitioning to civilian life makes sense for them and their families.

The Administration is committed to achieving seamless data integration and interoperability between the Department of Defense, VA, and also with private healthcare providers.

Meeting the challenge of interoperability must be addressed to make sure that Veterans receive the necessary and appropriate care in a timely manner.

The level of discretionary funding for FY 2015, which includes \$55.6 billion in advance funding from prior-year appropriations, is \$1.8 billion (2 percent) less than current comparable funding and \$398 million less than requested.

I do thank the Appropriations Committee for its decision to provide \$58.7 billion in advance FY 2016 funding for VA medical programs.

The measure boosts discretionary spending for the VA, providing \$64.7 billion for FY 2015, \$1.5 billion (2 percent) more than the comparable current level, while cutting military construction by \$3.3 billion (33 percent) to \$6.6 billion, equal to the administration’s request.

The administration, given current budget caps on defense and nondefense spending,